



Lenin arrives at the Finland Station in April, 1917

The April Theses

The [April Theses](#) is a classic document, not because it is polished (it is rough), but because of its impact at a moment of history. It was given by Lenin verbally. The written version (download linked below) was prepared very shortly afterwards.

Lenin arrived in Petrograd (later Leningrad; now St Petersburg) barely a month after the February, 1917 revolution which had overthrown the Tsar. A bourgeois republican government was installed that had the intention of continuing the disastrous intra-Imperialist war in which Russia was involved against

Germany and other countries. This is the war known to bourgeois historians as the First World War, the one that started in 1914 and ended in 1918. South Africa was also involved in it.

It was among those few individuals and small organisations who opposed the Imperialist war in South Africa that the need for our communist party was first seriously raised. The Communist Party of South Africa was formed by admission to the Communist International in 1921 – the same Communist International that Lenin called for in the April Theses in 1917. **Thesis 10** demands “*A new International.*”

“We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the social-chauvinists and against the ‘Centre’,” it says.

The Third International (also called Communist International or Comintern) was duly established in 1919.

The “social-chauvinists” of different countries (e.g. Germany, Britain, France and Italy as well as Russia) had in 1914 supported the Imperialist war against each other, thus betraying the Second International. But the Russian Bolsheviks and the German Spartacists had opposed the war, and had supported proletarian internationalism.

The term “revolutionary defencism” was a code for the further continuation of the Russian war policy, which Lenin clearly opposes in **Thesis 1**.

The “April Theses” are short and so do not require a long introduction. But one can usefully highlight the following:

Thesis 2 says *“The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution — which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie — ...*

“This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the special conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.”

There are echoes of this situation in South Africa today.

Thesis 4 says *“As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.”*

This led to the slogan **“All Power to the Soviets”**, and **Thesis 5** then says *“to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step.”*

Thesis 8 says: *“It is not our immediate task to “introduce” socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.”*

In other words, the bourgeois dictatorship was to be replaced at once by a dictatorship over the bourgeoisie.

Thesis 9 proposes to change the Party's name from "Social Democrat" (RSDLP) to "Communist Party."

So much of this did come to pass, as we know, that it is difficult to imagine that Lenin's support for these demands at the time, among the leadership and even among the strictly Bolshevik leadership, was small.

But what we have noted before, and which was manifest at the Second and Third Congresses of the RSDLP, applied again. Lenin knew how the base of the Party was constructed and how it was reproducing itself. Hence he was able to be bold. He knew that the cadre force of the Bolsheviks as a whole, and potentially the entire working masses of Russia, were behind his proposals, or soon would be. And so it came to pass.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The April Theses, 1917, Lenin](#).
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